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ABSTRACT

An evaluative study was done of the Teen Outreach Program, a national, multi-site effort to reduce teenage pregnancy, school failure, and dropout. The study sought to identify the critical "active ingredients" of the program responsible for its success. The study was based on analyses of data collected at 114 different sites nationally, from September 1986 through June 1989, involving 1,950 student participants and 2,257 carefully matched comparison students. Outcomes for students were assessed in terms of the number of problem behaviors experienced by Teen Outreach and comparison students at a given site, both prior to entry into the program and after participation in it for 1 year. A cumulative analysis of the data produced a summary of what is currently known about the conditions under which Teen Outreach is most effective and the aspects of the program that account for its success. These findings indicated that important program components were volunteer service by participants and classroom climate. Program structure (during versus after school) did not affect outcome. Student characteristics of gender, race, ethnic status, and socioeconomic status do not affect outcomes. Teen Outreach was found to be most effective with middle school students. A fact sheet, one figure, and a brief program description are included. (JB)

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FACT SHEET

TEEN OUTREACH PROGRAM

Evaluating Why and How the Teen Outreach Program Works:

Years 3 - 5 of the Teen Outreach National Replication (1986/87 - 1988/89)

January 1991

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Overview and Approach

After several consecutive years of documented success in reducing rates of teenage pregnancy, and school failure and dropout (Philliber & Allen, in press), the Teen Outreach Program began broadening its evaluation in the 1986-87 school year to try to identify the critical 'active ingredients' of the program that are responsible for its unusual record of success. Our strategy has been to identify student, facilitator and program characteristics that are related to the success of Teen Outreach at its most successful sites. Because Teen Outreach is a national, multi-site program, we are able to examine in detail which sites are most (and least) effective, and use this information to learn more about how and why the program works. In short, we have taken a rare step in program evaluation research by moving beyond asking "Does it work?" to consider the more informative questions: "What works?" "With whom?" and, "Under what conditions?"

The results reported below are based upon analyses of data collected at 114 different sites nationally, from September 1986 through June 1989, involving 1950 students in Teen Outreach, and 2257 carefully matched comparison students. Outcomes for students were assessed in terms of the number of problem behaviors experienced by Teen Outreach and comparison students at a given site, both prior to entry into the program, and after participating in it for one year. These problem behaviors include school failure, school dropout, suspension from school and experiencing or causing a pregnancy. In our analyses, we are careful to statistically account for important differences between sites (such as the number of problems experienced by students prior to entering Teen Outreach), and for changes that appear to be occurring not just in Teen Outreach students but in the larger student body at a school.[1] This strategy and our initial experience in examining these questions is already being documented as the state-of-the-art in evaluation research in major scholarly journals (Allen, Philliber & Hoggson, 1990). This report summarizes what we have learned to date from our efforts to evaluate the processes by which Teen Outreach is working.

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[1] This is done using a hierarchical regression model in which the total number of student problem behaviors at exit from Teen Outreach are predicted first by the number of problem behaviors at entry into the program, and second, by the change in problematic behavior which occurred from entry to exit in the *comparison* group of students at each site. Only after these effects are accounted for statistically do we consider the effect of other program features. Papers describing these analytic strategies, and results of analyses for data from individual academic years are available from the Association of Junior Leagues International, Inc.

Our evaluation efforts have been cumulative in nature, with each year's data being used to answer questions raised in prior years. What follows is a summary of what we have currently know about the conditions under which Teen Outreach is most effective, and the aspects of the program that are most closely related to its unprecedented record of success in preventing school dropout and teenage pregnancy.

Caveats

Several important caveats need to be kept in mind when interpreting these (and any other similar) process evaluation data. Our analytic strategy does not prove that program features that are related to program success at a site actually *caused* that site's success; rather our data tell us which factors are consistently associated with successful sites across the country. A second important caveat is that our approach can only detect relationships between program success and program features when a feature varies significantly across sites. Because we rely upon comparing different sites to each other, we cannot determine the importance of a feature if it is uniformly (or nearly uniformly) used across all sites. For example, if the curriculum were very consistently used at all sites, it would be virtually impossible to determine whether it was related to the success of the program. Only if we had sites that both did and did not use the curriculum very much could we determine its importance.

Major Findings

The findings presented below are divided into findings about four major aspects of the implementation of Teen Outreach: the efficacy of individual components of the program; the importance of how the program is structured; the role of student demographic characteristics; and the role of facilitator demographic characteristics.

Program Components

Volunteer service. One of the most consistent findings of three years of process evaluation efforts has been that ***the volunteer component of the Teen Outreach Program appears very closely linked to its success***. Our first look at the volunteer component suggested that the number of hours spent volunteering was slightly related to program success. Since then, we have recognized that the nature of the volunteer work actually performed, and how it is received by students, appears far more important than the number of hours of work performed. Specifically, volunteer work that engages students, and that they feel they had a choice in selecting, was very significantly associated with program success. These findings are based upon *student's* descriptions of the volunteer work; facilitator's perceptions of the volunteer work were not good predictors of program success. It thus appears to be quite important to get the impressions of young people performing the volunteer work in order to determine whether the work is likely to be a

positive experience for them. Analyses of our most recent process data also suggest that volunteer work performed in human service settings was more likely to be associated with the program's success in reducing pregnancy and dropout, than was volunteer work performed in school.

Curriculum use. The extent to which individual sites used the Teen Outreach curriculum has been marginally related to the success of the program at those sites. It was in Teen Outreach programs geared toward middle school students that use of the curriculum was most likely to be related to positive program outcomes. It is possible that the curriculum does not appear to be more important in part because virtually all sites use a significant portion of it. Thus we are left trying to distinguish sites that use a lot of the curriculum with sites that use a moderate amount of it.

Classroom characteristics. ***Teen Outreach classrooms in which students feel the climate is emotionally supportive and in which students (not facilitators) do a great deal of the talking were clearly associated with the success of the program.*** However, these findings were strongest in middle school classrooms, and were more marginal for high school classrooms. It did not appear to matter whether students formed a strong individual relationship or bond with their facilitator...as long as the facilitator was able to create a classroom environment in which students were not worried about being "put down" and could discuss fears and uncertainties.

Program Structure

We have repeatedly asked whether it makes a difference whether Teen Outreach is offered during vs. after school, and whether it is offered for credit, or as a not-for-credit extracurricular activity. No effects of these structural features have ever been detected. A marginal relationship was found in one year for the program to fare better in small to medium-sized towns than in large urban areas. However, given that the program has remained clearly successful even in years in which it was predominantly offered in large urban centers, it is clear that this is not an important factor related to the program's success. Thus far, therefore, ***Teen Outreach seems robust, in that where it is offered has not been significantly related to its success.***

Characteristics of Students

We have examined numerous characteristics of the students who participate in Teen Outreach. Across different sites, a wide range of students participate in the program. ***Student characteristics which are <u>not</u> related to the success of the program include students' gender, racial or ethnic status, and socio-economic status.*** There has been some evidence to suggest that the program may be more effective with students who are from single-

parent families, although this effect appears slight.

The one student characteristic that did appear related to program success in our evaluations was age. ***Teen Outreach has appeared to be most effective with older children.*** Evidence thus far supports the conclusion that the Teen Outreach program is successful with younger (e.g. middle school) students when the classroom portion of the program functions well. However, it should be noted that these findings are based upon evaluations of the program in the years in which it was first being offered to large numbers of middle school students, and thus may not have yet been as refined to the needs of that age group as it was to those of high school-age students.

Facilitator Characteristics

In trying to identify characteristics of the most effective Teen Outreach facilitators, we have had relatively little success thus far. Although there has been some slight signs that facilitators who were more educated, and who had more children of their own may have lead slightly more successful programs, ***the findings indicate that facilitators of all races, with a wide range of levels of education, and from very different backgrounds have successfully lead Teen Outreach programs.***

Conclusions

The three years of process evaluation findings summarized above complement the nationally recognized efforts evaluating the outcomes of the program (Philliber & Allen, in press) by providing a tremendous amount of information about *how* and *why* this innovative prevention program works. Using data from later years of the program replication, we are now beginning to examine more intensively the aspects of the program which have appeared most promising thus far. Although this report summarizes only our initial efforts at evaluating the processes by which Teen Outreach works, the amount of information provided is virtually without parallel among innovative prevention programs, or even among human service programs in general. As a result of these efforts, we now have strong evidence of the value of volunteer community service for young people, as well as important information about the structure of the program in which this service should optimally be imbedded. These findings not only guide the further development of the Teen Outreach Program, but also yield valuable insights about the critical ingredients of successful preventive interventions with youth in our society.

FACT SHEET

TEEN OUTREACH PROGRAM

THE EVALUATION OF TEEN OUTREACH
1984 to 1991

The evaluation of Teen Outreach began in the 1984-85 school year and has now covered 7 years, through 1990-91.

During that time, data have been gathered from:

** 3,674 Teen Outreach students, and
** 4,202 comparison students, nationwide and in Canada.

During the last three of these years, a portion of these students were in sites where true random assignment of Teen Outreach and control students was possible. The random assignment data set includes:

** 472 Teen Outreach students, and
** 496 comparison students.

In the entire 7 year sample, the following results have been obtained:

** a 5% lower rate of course failure in school;
** an 18% lower rate of school suspension;
** a 33% lower rate of pregnancy; and
** a 50% lower rate of school dropout among Teen Outreach students than among comparison students.

The differences in these rates between Teen Outreach and comparison students are statistically significant and participation in Teen Outreach is significantly related to each outcome when controls are introduced for race, gender, grade, mother's education, living arrangement, and pre-program levels of each of these indicators. In other words, this impact of Teen Outreach is net of the impacts of these other factors.

These same results in the random assignment subsample show:

** a 32% lower rate of course failure in school;
** a 37% lower rate of school suspension;
** a 43% lower rate of pregnancy; and
** a 75% lower rate of school dropout among Teen Outreach students than among a randomly assigned group of control students.

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These results too, are statistically significant and net of the control variables listed above.

Research on the components of the program that seem essential to its success show that it is important that each Teen Outreach group include the following:

A volunteer component that:

- **** includes assignments that actually engage students, and**
- **** gives young people choices about their volunteer work.**

A classroom environment that:

- **** students feel is emotionally supportive, and**
- **** in which students, rather than facilitators, do most of the talking.**

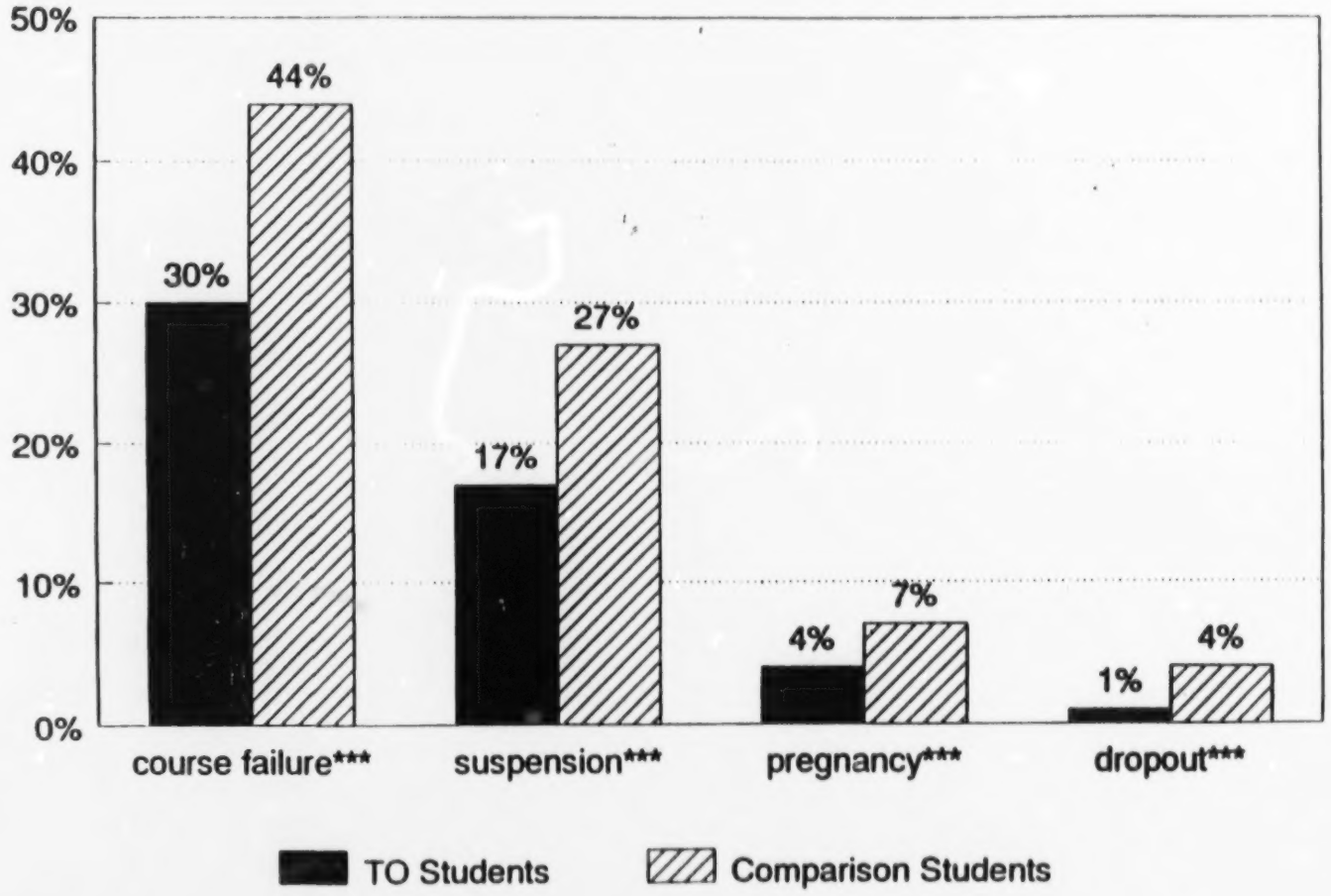
This research has also shown that the following are NOT related to the success of the program:

- **** student characteristics such as race or gender;**
- **** facilitator characteristics such as age, education, or background;**
- **** location of the program (urban or rural);**
- **** structural characteristics of the program such as whether or not it is offered for credit, whether it is after or during school.**

Thus, the results of the program seem robust in many settings and for varying audiences.

There is a trend in these data for the program to be more successful with older students. The program does have beneficial impacts on middle school students but at least in terms of the outcomes reported above, these impacts are not as consistently strong as they seem to be among older students. The program is currently developing a revised curriculum to be used with middle school students.

DATA FROM THE RANDOM ASSIGNMENT SAMPLE
1988-89 to 1990-91



***Participation in Teen Outreach is significantly related to lower rates of this behavior after controlling for race, gender, grade, mother's education, living arrangement and the pre-program level of each of these indicators. Note: (The significance level of Teen Outreach participation on pregnancy rates is .06)

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TEEN OUTREACH PROGRAM

The Teen Outreach Program (TOP) was established in 1978 by Brenda Hostetler, director of pregnancy prevention programs in the St. Louis Public Schools. In 1981, the Junior League of St. Louis and the Danforth Foundation began sponsoring the program, whose goal was to decrease the rate of adolescent pregnancy and increase the rate of high-school graduation for at-risk teens. In 1984, the Junior League of St. Louis initiated a national demonstration effort funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. Since 1987 the Association of Junior Leagues International Inc. (AJLI) has been responsible for the national program, with funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, the Smith Richardson Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the Stuart Foundations.

The Teen Outreach Program expanded from eight Junior League sponsors with nine classroom sites in 1984 to a total of 33 Junior Leagues and other community-based sponsors and 95 classroom sites in the 1992-93 school year. AJLI is currently developing state and community models to institutionalize TOP and replicate it on a wider basis. A state model for TOP is being developed in California, and preliminary discussions about state models are also underway in two other states. Additionally, AJLI is working with community sponsors in seven communities (Atlanta; Bronxville, NY; New Orleans; Reno; Roanoke, VA; Charleston, WV; and Seattle) to develop a community/school partnership which will focus on implementing the program on a district-wide basis.

Teen Outreach began as a comprehensive program to help adolescents develop a positive self-image, concrete life management skills, and future goals, though the marketing strategy identified it primarily as a program aimed at preventing adolescent pregnancy. Over the past six years, its focus has been on fostering positive development in at-risk youth.

In every Teen Outreach Program, a group experience, a facilitator/student relationship, and a volunteer experience build self-esteem and individual skills. A unique relationship develops between the program facilitators and the female and male adolescents who participate in the TOP curriculum in small peer-group settings. The community service component enhances the students' sense of self-worth and enables them to see themselves as valuable, contributing members of their communities. Both the volunteer component and the classroom discussions have been identified as key elements in TOP's success.

The 'helper-therapy' principle introduced by Riessman (1965) suggests that helping other people can be therapeutic and can lead to personal growth, particularly for persons in disempowered groups. A sense of empowerment is engendered by placing students in help-giving rather than help-seeking roles, such as in hospitals, nursing homes, day care centers and other community sites (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rappaport, 1987). The volunteer component is also based on the premise that when young people become effective volunteers, a belief that they can succeed in attempts to behave competently increases. This belief in turn leads to more persistent effort to perform competently (Bandura, 1977).

TOP's volunteer component is consistent with the notion that education may most effectively proceed in real-life settings outside of classrooms (Sarason, 1984). Gottfredson (1985) has noted that outside work may provide youths who do not fit into the mold of traditional schooling an alternative route for success; work may provide a legitimate means to meet needs and strengthen adolescents' bond to the social order. Because volunteer experiences teach pre-employment skills, yet do not increase financial independence from parents, they do not

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weaken parental control, a potential problem with teenage jobs. A successful TOP volunteer component ideally offers assignments that actively engage students and choices about their volunteer work.

TOP links the volunteer program to the school experience; a U.S. Department of Labor study found that work experience, when closely coordinated with school, increases both school attendance and grades (Barton & Frazer, 1980). An emotionally supportive classroom environment in which the students do most of the talking and facilitators relate to students in a compassionate and non-judgmental manner has been found to be most successful. The Teen Outreach classroom activities increase students' commitment to academic endeavors, to the program facilitator, to each other, and to TOP itself. Teen Outreach may increase adolescents' attachment and commitment to basic societal norms, such as completing school and avoiding delinquent behavior.

Finally, the Life Options curriculum, because it emphasizes positive decision-making skills, may enhance adolescents' skills in dealing with social situations they face. The curriculum presents topics and exercises that the facilitator can use to generate further group discussion. The content and the interactive style of sessions about relationships, life planning, peer pressure and family issues help teens learn to think critically about these issues and to evaluate their own behavior. TOP participants are helped to develop better communication skills and learn to resolve differences of opinion and other conflicts.

The average Teen Outreach group consists of 15 to 20 females and males. Sessions take place during the daily school curriculum or after school; at some of the schools it may be taken for credit. All Teen Outreach programs have a community sponsor, typically a Junior League but sometimes another community agency. The sponsor is responsible for 1) securing funding for the program, 2) arranging for and monitoring the volunteer experiences, and 3) collaborating with the school system.

TOP includes a significant evaluation component and maintains a database on participants and comparison students. National data indicate that the program has resulted in statistically significant reductions in teenage pregnancies and school failure. In the seven years ending in 1991, Teen Outreach participants averaged a 5 percent lower rate of course failure, a 18 percent lower rate of school suspension, a 50 percent lower rate of school drop out, and a 33 percent lower rate of pregnancy than students in the control group.

The Teen Outreach Evaluation represents 3,674 students at 60 sites who range in age from 11 to 21, and whose average age is 14.9 years old. About 40% of the students are black, 40% are white, and 13% are Latina/o. Those in other racial/ethnic groups include mostly native Americans and Asians.

Two-fifths of the participants come from single parent families; the parents of about one-fifth had less than a high school education. Approximately 1500 students participated in the program in the 1991-92 school year. Some students enter TOP on a volunteer basis when they hear of the program; others are targeted by program facilitators or counselors as at "high risk" for leaving school or becoming pregnant. High risk factors include having a parent or older sibling who did not graduate from high school or who became pregnant as a teenager. At still other schools, facilitators seek out students who are not yet exhibiting negative behaviors but who could be at risk.

TOP's congruence with related research undoubtedly contributes to its unusually positive outcomes. In 1987, the report of the National Research Council's Panel on Adolescent Pregnancy and Childbearing, Risking the Future: Adolescent Sexuality, Pregnancy and Childbearing, named TOP as one of only three teen pregnancy prevention strategies with any documented evidence of reducing pregnancy. The first published academic article on the Teen Outreach Program was published in the American Journal of Community Psychology in December 1990, entitled "School-Based Prevention of Teenage Pregnancy and School Dropout: Process Evaluation of the National Replication of the Teen Outreach Program." More recently, TOP's success has been documented in Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy: Model Programs and Evaluations.

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